Chapter IX
AUSTRALIA AND THE WEST IRIAN DISPUTE

It fell from Asia; severed from the East
It was the last unknown. Only the fringe
Was nervous to the touch of voyagers.

- KARL SHAPIRO, in "New Guinea".

generals, it's we that adorned
your chest with medals

... generals, one after another we fell
arms in hand against the Dutch
we now demand of your medals:
where's our Irian?

- AGAM WISPI, Indonesian poet.
Jakarta is a city of statues and monuments built by an imaginative engineer-President. They tower above the turmoil of city's centre, its ubiquitous canals, intersections of converging streets and ill-planned kampongs, which co-exist with grey-roofed houses and impressive ultra-modern structures. The latest addition to the skyline of the Indonesian capital is the grim figure of a tall man with outstretched arms, who appears to give out a yell after breaking his chains with a sudden burst of energy. The Liberation Statue at Banteng Square, inaugurated in 1963, is a monument to the successful struggle by Indonesia for West Irian, which in fact transformed the very tone and temper of Indonesian life. As his betjak moves ahead towards the cries of street vendors and pounding of stone-masons, a thoughtful visitor realizes that he has seen a monument to the wisdom and follies of men of affairs in Holland, Indonesia and Australia.

Genesis of the Dispute

The West Irian dispute began soon after 1949 and came up before the United Nations in 1954. It was not until 1962 that its settlement became "a part of history with which Australia can live." (1)

Largest of the world's islands after Greenland, New Guinea sprawls on the map like a huge bird, (2) flying above the continent of Australia. Its western half is almost half the size of the Australian State of New South Wales and was ruled by the Dutch until its formal transfer to the Republic of Indonesia on 1 May 1963. Under the Dutch, the Residenti Nieuwa Guinea (District of New Guinea) had the doubtful privilege of being the last-car-on-the-train. (3) It was a colossal slab of unrelenting rock at the eastern extremity of the Dutch Empire of the East, eighty per cent of it being cliff and jungle inhabited by 7,50,000 people, most of them primitive.

Time and again, the patriots of Indonesia had called for the unity of their nation "from Sabang to Merauke" - from the north-western tip of Sumatra to the border of Australian New Guinea. New Guinea was also represented as part of the ancient Majapahit and Srivijaya Empires. (4)

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2 G.T. Roscoe, Our Neighbours in Netherlands New Guinea (Brisbane, 1959), p.1. This writer points out that in the far north-west is the peninsula Vogelkop (Bird's Head) with the oil port of Sorong at the point of the beak. The South-western extremity is East Cape, which looks like the bird's tail, with the off-lying islands as loose feathers flying behind.

3 Henri Jacques Warmenhoven, Prelude to the West Irian Issue: An Evaluation of the Exclusion of Dutch New Guinea from the Transfer of Sovereignty to Indonesia in the Light of the Netherlands Colonial Philosophy (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Melbourne, Dept. of Political Science, March 1965), p.3. The expression is of Jan van Eechoud, who was a civil servant in New Guinea and wrote a number of books on it.
The Dutch claim to West New Guinea was not based on a physical conquest of the area. In 1660, they recognized the authority of the Sultan of Tidore over the Papuans. The Sultanate later became the vassal of the Dutch, who continued to rule over the area indirectly until 1949, when the Sultanate itself was formally incorporated into the Netherlands East Indies. Till then, the Dutch had been paying an annual rent to the Sultanate since 1895 for their de facto rule over New Guinea. In December 1945, Silas Papare, a Papuan Guerilla leader and founder of Partai Kemerdekan Indonesia Irian - the Irian Party for Independent Indonesia, organized a revolt of a Papuan army battalion against the Dutch, but it was crushed in 1946. In the same month, the Dutch held a

4 It was commonly held in Indonesia that the Madjapahit Empire extended from Sumatra to New Guinea. During the Srivijaya Empire of the VIII century, New Guinea was the known source of slaves, Birds of Paradise and feathers.

5 Alastair M. Taylor, Indonesian Independence and the United Nations (London, 1960), pp. 445-6. Colign, a Dutch writer, stated that the rule of Tidore over West New Guinea, though de jure, was "one of purely theoretical nature." One Dutch officer reportedly said: "Our Governor-General does not bother more about the Sultan than an elephant about a fly." Both quoted in Warmenhoven, n.3, pp. 13, 27.

6 For the origin of the word "Irian", see Gavin Souter, New Guinea: The Last Unknown (Sydney, 1963), p. 212. "Irian" is, in fact, a Papuan word, which was used by Frans Kasiepo, a Papuan delegate at the
conference in Malino, Celebes. This was a conference of the "representatives" of the outlying island provinces of the archipelago. The purpose was to undercut the Republic in Java by creating a federation of the rump provinces of the Indies, linked with Holland. In this, the so-called Stemplandagedachte (Homeland Ideal) was mooted out for the first time. This "homeland" was to be created for the hitherto privileged Eurasians in West New Guinea, though it was yet part of the Dutch-sponsored Negara Indonesia Timur - the "State" of the Great East. Then came the Linggadjati Agreement of November 1946, when it became clear that the Dutch were going to retain West New Guinea. The Government in The Hague were thinking in terms of keeping open "the possibility for larger settlements of the Netherlanders, in the first instance of Indo-Netherlanders ["i.e., Eurasians"] who want to live under their own management."(8)

These words, with minor variations, were repeated next month before the Den Pasar Conference of "delegates" of the rump "States", chosen by the Dutch

Malino Conference. This word was adopted by Silas Papare, when he founded his party. At the time of writing, Frans Kasiepo is the Governor of the Indonesia-held territory of West Irian.

7 Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, West Irian and the World (Djakarta, 1954), pp.24-25.

after careful screening. (9) The talk of self-determination for the Papuans was a nicety added much later, perhaps as an afterthought. Lieutenant Governor-General Van Mook emphasised the backwardness of the area and supported its exclusion from the Dutch-sponsored federation. To the Republicans in Java, the conference was a "stooge affair", but the exclusion of New Guinea from the Indonesian control was something which even these hand-picked delegates could not accept without protest. They retorted with Najamoedin resolution, which was approved by 68 votes out of 70. It said that, firstly, New Guinea had been part of the political unit of the Government of the Great East, secondly, "the population of New Guinea ... considers itself, through traditional ties, as a part of Indonesia" and lastly, New Guinea had strategic necessity to Indonesia, as demonstrated during the last war. A Balinese representative pointed out that the Great East without New Guinea must properly be considered the Small East. (10) The Dutch had, however, presented the Conference with a fait accompli, which

9 West New Guinea sent delegates to this Conference, but was not invited to the next two Great East Conferences.
10 Quoted in Bone, n.8, p.36.
the assertion of Indonesian will, epitomized by the Nadjamoedin resolution, could not alter. Thus unnoticed by most people, the issue of Irian Barat was born on 23 December 1946, and not during the Round Table Conference in The Hague three years later, as is usually believed.

As the years rolled on, the issue remained hanging fire in Holland and Indonesia. Two major parties in coalition in The Hague, supported by two minor parties, could not commit political suicide by giving up New Guinea. (11) In February 1947, a South Pacific Commission was created, as a result of an initiative from the Antipodes,(12) with Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the Netherlands as members. The membership of the last one was due to its possession of New Guinea. The failure of the Linggadjati Agreement was followed by the Renville truce in January 1948, which left everything as vague and undecided as it could be. In August 1949, the Round Table Conference between the

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11 Warmenhoven, n. 3, pp. 57-8. This writer has observed that After being in political wilderness for a long time, the Socialists in particular feared to stake their projected "doorbraak" (breakthrough) by destroying the legend of the Empire. At the cross-roads of interests and principles, they sacrificed the latter.

12 It resulted from the Canberra Agreement of 1947, though its history goes back to the ANZAC Accord of 1944. It was an agreement on technical co-operation between the six metropolitan powers and precluded every type of interference regarding the constitutional relationships between the mother governments and their territories.
Dutch and the Indonesians was held in The Hague. At that time, extremist politicians were urging in the Dutch Parliament that New Guinea, "this last emerald from this girdle of emeralds" and "a last relic to the Netherlands Crown" be preserved. (13) It was difficult for them to realize that New Guinea was a sunken hull of a dead empire. On the eve of the conference, Van Mook, who had resigned as Governor of the Indies, was asked to give his opinion on the Dutch policy of retaining New Guinea after the transfer of power in the Indies to the Republic. In his letter of 14 July, Van Mook advised against this, stating:

> We must consider whether the proposed policy will not again deprive us of a major part of the remaining goodwill in Indonesia for an objective that has only emotional value and will cause us endless trouble. (14)

Such voices of dissent were few in the Netherlands of 1949 and were thus easily ignored.

In the Round Table Conference, the Indonesian and Dutch positions were well defined. Delegates of

13 Quoted in Bone, n.8, p.45. The two expressions are from Welter, as he used them in the Second Chamber of the Netherlands Parliament.

14 Louis Fischer, The Story of Indonesia (New York, 1959), p.136. The contents of this letter were revealed to Louis Fischer by Dr van Mook himself. For a similar opinion expressed in the Dutch Parliament, see Warmenhoven, n.3, p.166. As this writer has stated, New Guinea was referred to as "the elephant on the attic."
the Dutch-sponsored federation and of the Republic were united in their demand for the transfer of West Irian to them, while the Dutch insisted on its retention. The issue of West Irian was the last on the agenda of the Conference and it was the only one that was not solved by it. However, the Australian representative in the UN Good Offices Committee, T.K. Critchley, had a hand in the compromise that eventually emerged. He suggested status quo for one year and then negotiations in a better atmosphere. The Dutch, the Republicans and the Indonesian Federalists accepted it, each for its own reasons. The agreement provided for the settlement of the dispute within the framework of the Netherlands-Indonesia Union. After having gained this “consolation prize” at the Conference, the Government won the “battle of votes” in the national Parliament on the night of 9 December 1949 after a debate lasting for three days. (15) From this date, the Indonesian state made its entry into the Family of Nations. It changed

15 Warmenhoven, n.3, pp. 161-2. "The exclusion of Dutch New Guinea", remarks Warmenhoven, "was nothing but a haphazard and last minute move, actuated only by the desire to impress Parliament with some minor victory in order to make the latter accept the Bill concerning the Transfer of Sovereignty so that at last the perpetual stalemate between the reality of Indonesian Revolution and the rigid and unrealistic views held by Parliament would definitely be forced to a conclusion."
the nature and character of the dispute. So far, it was between a colonial Power and its revolting subjects. But now, it was between two sovereign states.

In March 1950, it was decided to appoint a Commission of three Dutch and three Indonesians for a special conference of the Netherlands-Indonesia Union. However, the Dutch and the Indonesians in the Commission did not see eye to eye with each other on this question and, as such, no joint report came out. The Dutch, realizing that the idea of Eurasian "homeland" was impracticable, switched on to their concern for the welfare of the Papuans, which required the continuance of their rule in West New Guinea. At this time, the Australian attitudes also began to crystallize on the question. The result was that when the matter came up before the World Organization in 1954, the only two nations that voted against Indonesia from the region adjoining Southeast Asia were Nationalist China and Australia. (16)

The Roots of Australian Attitude

New Guinea was, from the very first, an object of Australian concern. Throughout the long years of European colonialism, the validity or desirability of Dutch rule in its western half was never questioned,

16 For figures on the break-up of Afro-Austral-Asian votes on the question, see Appendices.
though there were loud murmurs when France annexed New Caledonia in 1853, and Germany took possession of the northern coast of New Guinea in 1884. The Australians were sincere when they justified their conquest and subsequent annexation of German New Guinea as a result of the First World War. (17) In 1945, the British Empire and the United States were seen as strong arms of an Anglo-Saxon giant protecting Australia, (18) but New Guinea was yet an important in its defence. In 1946, Prime Minister Chifley asserted:

> The territory of New Guinea ... in which so many of our men died in battle against the Japanese is of such importance to the safety of this country that nothing but absolute control could be accepted by any Australian Government. (19)

17 For the remarks, in 1918, of Senator John D. Millens on this question, see CPD, Senate, vol.86 (14 November 1918), p.7785. Quoted in Henry S. Albinski, *Australia's Search for Regional Security in South-East Asia* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1959), p.30. Also quoted in H.S.Albinski, "Australia and the Dutch New Guinea Dispute", *International Journal*, vol.16, no.4 (Autumn 1961), pp.359-60. "It is not additional territory ... that we seek", observed the Australian Senator, "but it is greater safety today and for the future, so far as we can secure it ... We are not ... moved by any selfish or grasping spirit ... The one thing that we have in mind is greater security and increased protection."

18 Brand in CPD, Senate, vol.185 (2 October 1945), p.6181. The Senator said: "It is of vital interest to have the strong arm of America reaching southward towards our Northern territories, and Britain's stretching out again from Singapore."

19 *Current Notes*, vol. 17, no.8 (August 1946), p. 508. For the opinion of Menzies, the Leader of Opposition,
In 1946 and 1947, Australia opposed Indian moves to define the goal, in terms of independence, of Australian rule over its portion of New Guinea. When the USSR opposed the Australian intention to govern Papua and New Guinea as a single unit, the Sydney Morning Herald bluntly stated that "... it should be made quite clear that New Guinea's destiny is indissolubly linked with Australia's."(20)

In February 1947, Australia supported the inclusion of Holland in the South Pacific Commission. Since this was two months after the Den Pasar Conference, Australia was presumably thinking that Holland would continue its presence in this area. (21) Public opinion polls in August and later in February-March 1949 revealed anti-Indonesian feeling among the Australian people, precisely at a time when their own Government was boldly espousing the cause of Indonesian independence in the counsels of the world. (22) But the latter also did not envisage a complete elimination of the Dutch influence from the area. It sought compromise and partnership. Perhaps owing to

see CPD, HR, vol.179 (18 July 1944), p.181. He called New Guinea as a "military and political barrier reef to northwest Australia".

20 The Sydney Morning Herald, 4 August 1948.

21 See CPD, vol.208 (7 June 1950), p.3975 for Evatt's disclosure that the Dutch were included in this Commission because West New Guinea was a part of the Pacific rather than of Southeast Asia.

22 See Chapter III, footnotes 39, 40 and 41.
some sort of demographic determinism, New Delhi's indignation at the Dutch obduracy in the Indies was more thoroughgoing than Canberra's. Canberra supported what it perceived as inevitable, but tried to check the southward drift of the Asians through its opposition to the transfer of Dutch New Guinea to the Republic of Indonesia. According to an informed view, even before the elections in December 1949, the Government in Canberra was opposed to changing the status of the Dutch half of New Guinea. (23) Both Spender and Holt of the Opposition Liberal Party criticised the Chifley Government on the ground that a flushed, nationalist Indonesia might turn her attention to the Dutch and Australian portions of New Guinea. (24)

The general election of 1949 synchronized with a marked change in the thinking of the Australian people. The reason was that the westward thrust of Communist influence came to a halt in Prague and western Europe was militarily linked up through the NATO alliance. Checked in the west, it now appeared to turn eastwards. In 1948, an ex-Communist claimed that the Australian Communists were trying to establish, through the control of Trade Unions, a situation favourable to Asian invasions. (25) Thus, in the Australian

23 Taylor, n.5, p. 442 fn.
mind, a marriage was effected of the old fear of Asia and the new fear of communism. This was also the period when, one by one, the major cities in China were falling to the Communists. Also, there were armed insurrections led by Communists in Vietnam, Malaya, Burma and the Philippines. The Near North was now the new battleground of the Cold War. Through their policy of non-alignment, the newly independent Asian nations were chartering their own course in the uncertain world of nineteen-fifties. "Australia", it has been pointed out, "could not react to these developments with the same independence and confidence it had shown in Dutch-Indonesian conflict." (26) The attitudes towards New Guinea could, thus, no more be as flexible as they might have been in earlier years.

**Australian Reaction to the West Irian Impasse**

It was from January 1950 onwards that President Sukarno began to talk more about West Irian. Australians began to take notice of this, but it is doubtful if they were really hostile. Denis Warner wrote from Jakarta:

> It seems inevitable that the Indonesians will have Dutch New Guinea within twelve months, probably sooner .... Certainly Australians here accept it as almost an accomplished fact. (27)

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The importance of the issue was realized in Australia with the increase in the bluntness of the Indonesian demand. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, therefore, warned:

"There is every reason why Canberra should regard with the gravest misgivings the substitution of a weak and incompetent administration in an area vital to Australia's security." (28)

On his way back from Colombo Conference of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers in January 1950, Spender, as new Minister for External Affairs, visited Jakarta and presumably discussed the issue of Western New Guinea with the leaders of Indonesia. However, a serious discussion on the subject was not possible at this stage, as a Commission of three Dutch and three Indonesian members was seized of the matter. Though Australia did not publicly support Holland, its preferences were not quite unknown at that time.

Australian fears were really aroused when Mohammad Yamin, the Adviser of the Indonesian delegation to the Round Table Conference in The Hague, reportedly said that the people of Australian New Guinea should be allowed to choose their own way. (29) The *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted in ibid., p.75.

Herald also claimed that the Indonesians did not regard their country as complete without Dutch and Australian New Guinea, British Borneo and Portuguese Timor. (30) Hindsight suggests that these fears, particularly those relating to Indonesian ambitions regarding Australian New Guinea, were totally unfounded and were unfair to the Indonesians. Coming from the champions of their recent salvation, such views must have looked queer to the Indonesians. But the supposed ambitions of Indonesia with regard to Australian New Guinea created a fear among most Australians. As a result of it, whatever sympathy they had for their nearest Asian neighbours began to vanish now. Answering Yamin, Spender said:

... the United States of Indonesia had not the slightest shadow of a claim to Australian New Guinea on any ground, ethnic, racial or otherwise. (31)

Australian opposition to the Indonesian claim to Dutch New Guinea was also strongly voiced by the Sydney Morning Herald. (32) The Australians in the United Nations predicted that after getting hold of West New

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31 Ibid., 1 February 1950.
32 Ibid. It wrote: " ... Frankly, however, we do not want them in any part of New Guinea and do not believe that they have any need of right to establish themselves there. West New Guinea should remain in the hands of the Dutch or be placed under trusteeship. East New Guinea is in our charge, and we shall firmly hold it...."
Guinea on the charge of imperialist incompetence, (33) a view which was expressed by Spender in The Hague later in August. (34)

Soon the Dutch indulged in activities which emotionally charged the already electric atmosphere in Jakarta. The Westerling coup on 23 January 1950 was interpreted by authorities in Jakarta as an attempt by the Dutch to support Sultan Hamid of Borneo in his attempt to overthrow the Central Government. As a result of it, Prime Minister Hatta announced the formation of a unitary state, based on the earlier Republican constitution of 1945. Then, there were revolts in Moluccas and Macassar led by people, who had held important positions in the Dutch-sponsored federation or the Dutch army. Secession of Sulewesi (Celebes), Sumatra and West Borneo was also rumoured. In West Java, the Darul Islam bands were on war path. Surprisingly enough, these events had opposite reactions in Indonesia and Australia. Indonesians saw in it the attempt by a discredited colonial Power to stage a come-back in their recently liberated country. Retention of West New Guinea by the Dutch, they thought, would provide a base to the colonial Power, from which the latter would easily hatch plots and organise military expeditions. Australians had little sympathy with the Republic, still in the throes of a new birth. They

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For Spender's statement, see Souter, n.6, p. 218.
argued that since Indonesia could not control its own territory, its take-over of West New Guinea would only lead to chaos there. (35) During the Westerling revolt, the Australian Press gave "homilies" to the Indonesians on the dangers of adding New Guinea to their "basket of troubles". (36) Evatt, now in opposition, suggested in Parliament that Australia should participate in Dutch-Indonesian talks.

As the Indonesian indignation mounted, the Australians were also united in their opposition to the Indonesian claim. The *Sydney Morning Herald* stated the Australian position in its editorial in these words:

> If there was one military lesson to be drawn from the war with Japan, it was that New Guinea must be an integral part of Australia's defence .... The intrusion of a weak, incompetent Indonesian administration would tear island defences wide apart. (37)

The editorial went to the extent of suggesting that the Dutch should be made to feel that they could count upon the support of Australia, something that

36. For example, see *ibid.*, 25 January 1950.
would strengthen the already strong Dutch and deter the Indonesians from "the alienation of their nearest and most powerful neighbour."

The Government in Canberra was still reluctant to announce its policy. (38) On 15 May, Jakarta demanded 200 million Dutch Guilders from The Hague for damage caused by K.N.I.L. forces during the Westerling and Macassar revolts. (39) At this time, Australia recalled its Ambassador to Jakarta for consultations. It is significant that Ambassador John Hood of Australia had been recalled before the publication of the report of the joint Dutch-Indonesian Commission. It, therefore, seems that Spender had little hope of its success. On the one hand, President Sukarno, in his characteristic style, made strong remarks on the question and, on the other, the Dutch set up a New Guinea Council to advise the Governor, conducted "elections" and issued stamps and coinage even before the report of the joint Commission was out. Australia's recall of its Ambassador was thus intended to test the effect of its quiet diplomacy on Indonesia.

38 See Spender's statement in ibid., 17 April 1950 for an evidence of Australian inclinations. In this, Spender affirmed that "Australia is in New Guinea and must in all circumstances remain there."

39 Ibid., 16 May 1950. Also see ibid., 23 May 1950 for a report of Sukarno's broadcast stating that "West New Guinea must return to our fold."
Chifley and the Opposition now adopted the role which Menzies had adopted when the former was in power. They criticised the Government for its weak-kneed policies with regard to the Indonesian claims. Evatt, in his speech, rejected the Indonesian demand for West New Guinea on racial grounds. Although the Liberal spokesmen blamed Evatt for the Indonesian problem, the importance of the latter's speech lies in the fact that it pledged the support of the Opposition to the Government's policy of being tough with Jakarta on the question of Dutch New Guinea. Calwell warned against trusting the Indonesian President since he had been "a Japanese puppet" and observed that "the Indonesians in New Guinea were as bad as Indonesians in Darwin." (40) In another speech, he said that if the Dutch ever thought of relinquishing West New Guinea, it should come to Australia. (41)

Indonesians were puzzled that the Australians were so much concerned and even violent over the matter.

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41 Ibid. (22 March 1950), p. 1094.
of West New Guinea's transfer to their own country. (41)
The attitude of Australia, complained the Times of
Indonesia, was "more pro-Dutch than the Dutch". (42)
As Ambassador Hood left Jakarta, Sukarno clearly
stated that Indonesia had no aspirations to control East
New Guinea. He further said:

As soon as Western New Guinea is in our
hands, there will be no suspicions bet­
ween Australia and Indonesia, as we can
co-operate on the basis of clear and
honest friendship. (43)

It was, however, argued in Australia that even if the
Indonesian reassurances were to be believed, the unstable
regime in that country was bound to facilitate a Communist
take-over. "We can guarantee Australia and the whole
world", declared Sukarno, anticipating this argument,
"that if we obtain sovereignty over New Guinea, it will
not become Communist." (44) But many in Australia felt,
as did Calwell, that "Soekarno would be a rotten reed
on which to rely in any crisis." (45) The oddity of the
situation was that just as the Australians were unable to
see the logic of Sukarno's claim, the latter was also
unable to see the logic of the Australian claim to a
special interest in the area.

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41 For an expression of this astonishment on the part of
Indonesia, see Sunario (Indonesia) in UN, GAOR, session
9, plen. meeting 484, 30 September 1954, p. 124.
42 Souter, n.6, p. 221. Also see ibid.
43 The Sydney Morning Herald, 24 May 1950.
This was the period when Prime Minister Menzies announced that Australia would send an R.A.A.F. squadron to Malaya which was represented as "the last effective barrier between this country and the forces of militant Soviet communism that have flooded all over Asia." It was doubted if Indonesia, despite its greater area and resources, would care to halt the Communist tide from the mainland of Asia. Hatta's recommendation to the Indonesian Parliament in favour of the recognition of the Ho Chi Minh regime of North Vietnam was unpopular in Australia. This regime was regarded in the country as a prop of the Communists of China and Russia in their drive to expand in the direction of South and Southeast Asia. Doubting the reliability of Indonesia in this regard, the Sydney Morning Herald pointed out that "a neighbour who plays ball with agents of Soviet Communist imperialism is precisely the sort of neighbour Australia would wish to keep at arm's length."(46) It suggested in the same breath that Australia should approach the Security Council for strategic trusteeship over the area since it was vital to Australian security as the Indonesian control of it would be

45 Calwell in ibid., p. 3894.
46 The Sydney Morning Herald, 8 June 1950.
prejudicial to peace. But all these pleas were unintelligible to the Indonesians, who were perplexed at the Australian pre-occupation with its own security, while the security of Indonesia continued to be jeopardised because of the Dutch presence in West New Guinea.

On 8 June, Indonesians gathered in a large number to greet a dear foreign visitor - India's Prime Minister Nehru. President Sukarno addressed them, saying: "We don't want 50 per cent freedom or 60 or 70 or 90 per cent; we want hundred per cent freedom." (47) No doubt, India and Indonesia were free, "but don't forget the Irian", he urged. A day earlier, Sir Wilfrid Kent Hughes proposed on the floor of the Australian Parliament that they make a united and unanimous statement on New Guinea, opposing the Indonesian claim over the Dutch half of the island. (48) Next day, Spender addressed the House explaining why West New Guinea was to be retained as a separate Dutch possession. (49) Evatt had the same view as Spender and proposed a UN Trusteeship over the Netherlands New Guinea with Australia as a sole or joint trustee. He also added that if the Dutch wished to dispose of the territory, the Australians should

49 Ibid. (8 June 1950), pp. 3972-3.
offer to buy it. (50) The Australian outbursts were duly taken note of in Jakarta, which now bluntly rejected the former's interest in the problem, saying that West New Guinea was "an internal question to be settled between the Netherlands and Indonesia." (51) By August, the Indonesians were so much exasperated with the Australian attitude that President Sukarno warned Australia that its attitude towards New Guinea was making the development of friendly relations difficult. (52)

Soon the Dutch-Indonesian Joint Commission broke down, due to lack of agreement between its members from the two countries. About this time, Spender paid a visit to The Hague. There he made a lengthy statement rejecting the Indonesian claim. He said:

The Australian Government does not consider that Indonesia has any valid claim to Dutch New Guinea, the future of which is of vital importance to the Australian people ... If the claims of Indonesia were conceded to any degree at all, it would be a matter of time ... when the claim will be pushed further so as to include the trust territory of Australian New Guinea and its people. Experience has shown to the Australians how strategically vital to Australian defence is the mainland of New Guinea ... (53)

50 Ibid., p. 3976. For full speech of Evatt, see pp. 3973-6.
51 The Sydney Morning Herald, 13 July 1950.
52 Ibid., 26 July 1950.
Such a support was most welcome to the Dutch and, as an Australian writer has asserted, it encouraged Holland to retain New Guinea. (54) Spender also got an assurance from the Dutch that they would not abandon New Guinea to the Indonesians.

In fact, the Australian Government was now playing a dangerous diplomatic game. The Australian efforts to avoid a common frontier with the Indonesians kept the cauldron of New Guinea simmering. They perhaps thought that Indonesia would remain a weak nation putting up with the intransigence of the ex-colonial Power. But it is a poor policy planner, who builds his policy on the assumption of permanent weakness of a given country. The issue also brought a rift in the Commonwealth of Nations, where India supported Indonesia, though its support was qualified with pleas for peaceful settlement. Britain too did not categorically support Australia and Holland on the question and Spender was "bitterly disappointed" at Bevin's refusal to oblige. (55)

The position was different with regard to the United

53 Quoted in Souter, n.6, p.218.
54 Ibid.
States. There was a rumour throughout the world that America was negotiating an agreement with Holland for bases in New Guinea. (56) A State Department official denied the rumour, but affirmed that his country was supporting the Dutch position. (57) This too was later denied. (58) It was also pointed out by an eminent scholar that the American officials looked upon New Guinea as a possible territory for future Japanese migration. (59) An Australian study (60) has pointed out that the Government spokesmen were outspoken on the West New Guinea question, apparently because of the American support. Their posture also emboldened the Dutch at the Hague Conference.

The Conference began in the Netherlands capital on 4 December. Dr Roem, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, offered Dutch administration for ten years in return for immediate de jure transfer of West Irian to Indonesia. The Dutch offered to give sovereignty to the Netherlands-Indonesia Union. Each party was thus eager to have

56 The Sydney Morning Herald, 13 November 1950.
57 Ibid., 18 November 1950. Also The Advertiser, 18 November 1950.
58 The Advertiser, 10 January 1951. Cited in Schneider, n. 55, p. 135.
60 Schneider, n. 55, p. 135.
soverignty for itself, though agreeing to certain concessions to the other. There was a total deadlock and the Conference broke down. The Indonesian Premier, Dr Natsir, now declared that the only negotiations his country would have in future would be on the basis of a transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia. President Sukarno told a Jakarta rally that New Guinea would return to Indonesia "before sunrise of January 1st, 1951", (61) and from now onwards, such declarations came with increasing rapidity from Jakarta's Istana Merdeka. (62) Whatever was the outcome of this conference, Australia had made its innings in it. The Dutch had remained firm, though the Indonesians had displayed a spirit of compromise.

During this period, the Australians were assiduously trying to cultivate the neighbouring Asian nations and, especially, Indonesia through their economic assistance. In 1950, Indonesia accepted economic aid from Australia and joined the Colombo Plan two years later. But this brought into light the contradiction in the Australian policy. A Dutch language paper in Indonesia criticised Spender's refusal to "... run the risk of a joint border with

61 The Sydney Morning Herald, 17 January 1951.
62 Istana Merdeka (Freedom Palace) is the official residence of the President of the Republic of Indonesia.
Indonesia \~ in New Guinea \~ while at the same time supporting economic development of backward Southeast Asian countries and doing everything to win their friendship.\((63)\) However, the Australian distrust of the Asian "neutralist" belt and its capacity to withstand the Communist tide explains part of this contradiction. The fear of communism had made the fear of Asia more pointed and, to prove this, Prime Minister Menzies quoted Zhdanov, who had reportedly said in 1947 that one of the tasks of communism was to attack the "Capitalist rear" by supporting nationalist and dissident movements in Southeast Asia.\((64)\)

Spender's policy was actively pursued by Casey. In his Friends and Neighbours, Casey elaborated the Australian views on the subject with clarity and precision.\((65)\) He stated the legal aspects of the problem, as well as the non-legal ones. The legal aspects were these: firstly, the Netherlands New Guinea was specially excluded from the territories transferred under the Charter of Transfer of Sovereignty. From the beginning, the Dutch made it clear that they did

\((63)\) Quoted in Sydney Morning Herald, 12 February 1951.

\((64)\) Quoted in Bone, n.8, p.111. The remark of Zhdanov is from Red Fleet, the Russian naval journal.

not regard its future as one of the matter under discussion. Further, the general intention of the Round Table Conference was expressed clearly in Article 2 of the Charter which said that Dutch sovereignty should continue until modified by agreement between the parties. Lastly, the separate and distinct character of the Residency of New Guinea was recognized by the Dutch under their administration of the Indies. As such, it had never been part of what was (in 1954) Indonesia. As for other aspects, Casey asserted that the population of West Irian was different in ethnic origin, language and culture from the Indonesians. "Dutch New Guinea", he wrote, "has ... far greater natural links with Australian New Guinea than it has with the Indonesian islands."

Secondly, Indonesia had most complicated and intricate economic and political problems to solve, and there were limits to its ability to ensure proper administration and defence of New Guinea. Lastly, New Guinea had strategic importance to Australia and as such, the latter was interested in its future. Its strategic importance was demonstrated to Australia during the two World Wars.

These arguments were refuted from Indonesian and other (66) quarters. But Casey was correct when he

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66 For a rebuttal of these, see B.P.L.Bedi, Hands Off West Irian (New Delhi, n.d.). Also see, speeches of
said that it was "not only the view of the Australian Government but is a strong conviction with the people of Australia." (67) The Australian opinion was strongly opposed to the Indonesian claim. The Gallup Poll in February 1950 showed that only 6 per cent of the Australians were in favour of Indonesian rule of West Irian. Of the rest, 42 per cent favoured Australian rule (which was an illogical and impossible demand), 23 per cent its retention by the Dutch and 16 per cent its supervision by the United Nations. (68) Three months later, the support for Indonesian position dropped to 4 per cent. (69) Thus the Government of Australia was doing something that the nation wanted it to do, which is quite in line with the democratic principle. But this attitude was in contrast with the attitude of the ALP Government on the question of Indonesian independence. Australian public opinion at that time was, at best, indifferent, if not hostile, though some articulate groups in the Australian society were working in favour of the independence of Indonesia from the Dutch. Among

Afro-
some/Asian delegates (particularly those of India, Burma, Liberia, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon) in UN, GAOR, session 9, plen. meetings 727-33, 23-29 November 1954, pp. 389-440.

67 Casey, n. 65, p. 102.
68 The Australian Public Opinion Polls, Nos. 662-76 (March-April, 1950), p. 2
the political parties, the Liberals were consistent in their opposition to the Indonesians. But supporters of the Australian Labour Party changed their earlier position and supported the LCP Government on this issue.

Although the Liberal-Country Party Government, led by Menzies, had the backing of the whole nation behind it, its stand on West Irian changed the alignments among the Middle Powers in the vicinity of Australia. Great strain was put on the relations with Jakarta, which the Chifley Government had diligently built up recently. Denis Warner reported from Jakarta:

Ten days ago, the Indonesians politely forgot the White Australia Policy and greeted Australians — with every justification — as the primary architects of their independence. Now their gratitude is tinged with astonishment, if not disbelief, that Australia was not fully aware of what it was doing when it backed the cause of full Indonesian independence. (70)

The Dutch-Australian relations, on the other hand, improved. In October 1950, the Governor of West New Guinea visited Australia. The Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs, J.M.A.H. Luns, and Minister for Overseas Territories, W.J.A. Kernkamp, arrived in 1953 and held discussions on co-operation between the two countries with Casey and Hasluck (then Australian Minister for Territories). Australia also established a regular air service between the two halves of New Guinea.

70 The Advertiser, 7 January 1950. Quoted in Schneider, n.55, pp. 131-2.
Canberra's new posture vis-a-vis Jakarta was surprising not only to the Indonesians but also to other Asian neighbours of Australia. (71) Their leaders and Governments had until recently worked hand in hand with those of Australia on the question of Indonesian independence. They were now at pains to understand Australia's new love for a colonial Power, which was thoroughly discredited for its role in Indonesia.

While the Prime Ministers of Colombo Powers (Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan), meeting in Kandy on 2 May 1954, denounced colonialism in general terms, (72) they gave unqualified support to Indonesia, when they met again in Bogor on 29 December. (73) Next year, the Conference of 29 Afro-Asian States, held in Bandung on 18-24 April 1955, also supported the Indonesian position. (74)

Indonesia submitted the case to the United Nations in 1954. It came up before the General Assembly.

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71 For Asians' reaction to Australian policy on West Irian, see K.G. Tregonning, "Australia's Imperialist Image in South-East Asia", Australian Quarterly, vol. 23, no. 3 (September 1961), pp. 43-44. Also see __, "New Guinea", Eastern Economist (New Delhi), vol. 15, no. 8 (25 August 1950), p. 285. Also see Asian views in the UN General Assembly (full reference in fn. 66) in the next two pages.


73 Article 12 of the communique. See ibid., pp. 71-72.
Sir Percy Spender, then Australian Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations, explained the Australian case, stressing that "the destiny of Australia is closely bound up with the island."(75)

Sunario, the Indonesian delegate, took pains to disclaim any expansionist design on the Australian half of New Guinea and reiterated his country's desire to live at peace with Australia. (76) In the debate, Afro-Asians not only attacked Holland, but also made some acid comments on Australia's role in the dispute. India's Krishna Menon regretted that Australia did not follow the policy which led to her bringing the Indonesian question before the Security Council earlier, as this had implications "from the point of view of friendship between the Asian and non-Asian peoples of that part of the world."(77) Burma's Barrington also referred to these regional implications, saying that

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76 UN, GAOR, session 9, plen. meeting 484, 30 September 1954, p. 124. Speech of T. Sunario.
77 Krishna Menon in ibid., 1st Committee, meeting 733, 29 November 1954, p. 440.
... Surely Australia would safeguard its security better in the long run by reaching greater understanding and closer co-operation with its Asian neighbours than by isolating itself from Asia and hoping that West New Guinea would remain under the control of the Netherlands. (78)

An Asian delegate dismissed the Australian argument on security as "old imperialist argument of the vital interests of communication lines and military bases". (79) Replying to Spender's plea of "intensity of Australian feelings" on the question, a West African delegate retorted that

It seemed strange that although he [the Australian delegate] had not hesitated to recall with emotion his country's few years of struggle against Japan, he had reproached Indonesia for giving vent to its feelings in looking back over three hundred years of struggle against colonial domination. Such irrational colonialism might mean that Australia viewed every Asian neighbour as a threat and every occupation of territory by Europeans as a safeguard. (80)

The Indonesian failed in the General Assembly, as it did not get the required two-thirds votes. But the

78 Barrington (Burma) in ibid., meeting 729, 26 November 1954, p. 412. Also see Krishna Menon's earlier remarks in ibid., plen. meeting 492, 6 October 1954, p. 227. In this, he said (replying to Casey): "... We are sorry that this statement came from Australia, which is part of that area usually called Australasia. They are to live with us for centuries to come." (Emphasis added).

79 Shukairi (Syria) in ibid., 1st Committee, meeting 731, 27 November 1954, p. 424.

80 Cooper (Liberia) in ibid., meeting 729, 26 November 1954, p. 413.
support for Indonesia had grown so much in Afro-Asia that, except for Nationalist China, all the countries of Asia voted in its favour.

In the period under review, the tragi-comedy of West Irian had a beginning, but it had no climax and no end. As the years rolled on, Irian Barat became "a chemical hate-inducer," which bound together the otherwise disjointed Indonesian society. Sukarno, the living father of Indonesian nationalism, made increasing use of the West Irian dispute to strengthen it. But this too was a dangerous game and had serious consequences. When the drama opened after Merdeka, the country was on the right track, with Hatta guiding its economic destiny and Sukarno its political future. The emotions generated by the irredentist upsurge threw the gentle and soft-spoken Javanese into the depths of desperation. The "guided democracy", konfrontasi and the web of slogans and words built around them followed in the wake of this new, and rather harsh, tone of national life. It required a coup d'état and the bloodbath following it to reverse, what the people had thrust on themselves for getting what, they genuinely thought, was their due. It also presented the ego-centric Australians with new challenges, though they little realized how much they themselves had contributed to bringing about this
situation. This contention is supported by a recent Australian opinion, which says:

... If Australian diplomacy had been directed during the early 1950s towards encouraging a peaceful transfer of West New Guinea to Indonesia, instead of encouraging the Dutch to stay, Australia would have spared herself the indignity of fence-sitting and perhaps have earned the gratitude of the nation of 100 million people with whom, whether she liked or not, she would soon have to share a common border. (81)

Now as the statue at Jakarta's Banteng Square casts its stoney eyes towards infinity, the ship of Indonesian state starts its sail again in the immense ocean, in which it had been flung down in the deep depths by angry storms, only to emerge again and resume the voyage.

81 Souter, n.6, p.232. Also see L. Metzemaekers, "The West New Guinea Problem", Pacific Affairs, vol.24, no.2 (June 1951), pp.140-141. This Dutch writer has claimed that his country's policy on West New Guinea was due to the pressure exerted on it by other Western Powers, especially Australia during 1950s. For an examination of this view, see Arend Lipjhart, The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea (New York and London, 1963), p.65.